

Germany in Transition, 1919-39

Hitler's foreign policy

Hitler's foreign policy aims

Hitler had promised to make Germany great again, and he had five aims to help him achieve this. He wrote about these in his book, 'Mein Kampf'.

Task: For each of the aims, explain what it means and why Hitler wanted to do this.

- Reverse the Treaty of Versailles:
- Unite all German-speaking people:
- Destroy communism:
- Lebensraum (living space):
- Anschluss (with Austria):

In 1932, 60 nations met to discuss ways in which their countries would disarm to reduce the chances of a war. However, it failed to achieve anything. A year later, Hitler said this:

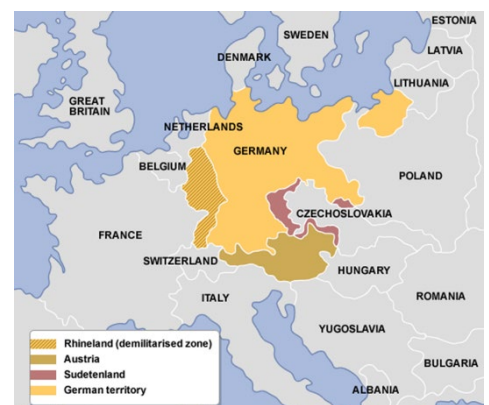
"Germany is at any time willing to undertake further disarmament... if all other nations are ready to do the same".

The other countries were reluctant to reduce their military, so instead Hitler announced that the German army would increase to 300,000, and he was setting up an Air Ministry. This broke the Treaty of Versailles, but nothing was done. Germany also withdrew from the League of Nations.

Task: Explain why the Disarmament Conference was key in shaping Hitler's Foreign Policy.

The Rhineland 1936

The Rhineland had been demilitarised under the Treaty of Versailles, and this was confirmed by the Locarno Pact. In 1936 Hitler denounced Locarno, and moved his troops in the Rhineland. Hitler was ready to withdraw if he was challenged by Britain or France, but they did not react. This convinced Hitler that Britain and France were unlikely to act against further aggression. Hitler held a vote in Germany, which showed 99% of people supported his decision. This led Hitler to challenge the Treaty of Versailles even further.



Task: Put these events into the correct order.

Order	Event
	However, France, along with Britain, did not oppose the move.
	Hitler had begun rearming Germany – increasing its military
	Hitler claim Germany was being encircled, and used this as justification for moving troops into The Rhineland.
	The Treaty of Versailles had ordered that Germany was not allowed troops in the Rhineland.
	In 1935 Hitler introduced conscription.
	This led Hitler to become more confident in terms of foreign policy.
	Hitler was ready to withdraw troops should France oppose him.
	Hitler asked the people in a referendum whether they supported his re-occupation. 98.8% said that they did.

Anschluss 1938

Hitler had tried to unite with Austria in 1934, but this failed due to his fear of Mussolini. However, by 1938 he was much more confident. His army was bigger, Mussolini was now an ally, and the Nazi Party in Austria were stronger. This led him to attempt the Anschluss once again. The events are below:

- ❖ Hitler encouraged the Austrian Nazi Party to stir up trouble, staging demonstrations demanding a union with Germany.
- ❖ Hitler ordered bombings of public buildings and mass rallies.
- ❖ Hitler bullied the Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg, into accepting two Austrian Nazis into his cabinet.
- ❖ Schuschnigg held a vote on the future of Austria.
- ❖ Hitler threatened invasion – he bullied Schuschnigg into resigning. Hitler sent troops to restore order.
- ❖ The Anschluss was proclaimed.
- ❖ 99.75% of Austrians voted in favour of the Anschluss.

Britain and France protested, but ultimately did nothing. They were following a policy of appeasement – trying to avoid a war at all costs. Once again Hitler had broken the rules, and got away with it.

Task: Explain which of Hitler's aims the Anschluss achieved. (Clue: there are several!)

The Sudetenland Crisis 1938

The Sudetenland was part of Czechoslovakia, and it contained 3 million Germans. It also had valuable factories and industry. This made Hitler want to take over. He ordered the Sudeten Nazi Party to stir up trouble. Hitler then used this 'crisis' to threaten to use military force. The Czechs did not want to surrender the Sudetenland because a lot of their military defences were based there. They believed the French would support them.

See the timeline of events for what occurred next.



15 th September 1938	Hitler demanded the Sudetenland and threatened war. Chamberlain (British PM) offered to discuss the matter, and the Czechs were forced to agree.
22 nd September 1938	Hitler increased his demands, saying land should be given to Poland and Hungary as well, threatening war if his demands weren't met by 1 st October. Britain and France rejected his demands.
29 th September 1938	The leaders of Britain, France and Italy meet with Hitler at the Munich Conference. They agree that Sudetenland will be given to Germany, with Poland and Hungary also receiving land. The leader of Czechoslovakia wasn't invited to the talks.
30 th September 1938	Hitler and Chamberlain signed an agreement, agreeing never to go to war with each other. This was greeted positively in Britain, as war had been avoided.

Task: Match up the following countries to their consequences of the Munich Conference.

Czechoslovakia	They realised that opposition was weak, and their leader gained more confidence. They also gained a lot of important industrial land.
Britain	Their leader was furious that he wasn't invited to the conference. They felt they would not have support if Hitler attacked them.
France	Land was lost to Germany, Poland and Germany, and they had been deserted by their allies.
Germany	They supported Germany throughout, and their leaders became even closer.
The USSR	There was a huge sense of relief that there was not going to be a war. Their leader was greeted like a hero.
Italy	There was massive relief that war was avoided, especially as they shared a border with Germany.

In March 1939 Hitler took over the rest of Czechoslovakia. This showed he could not be trusted, and led Britain and France to abandon their policy of appeasement.

The Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Outbreak of War

On August 23 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed an agreement, called the Nazi Soviet Pact. This was a surprise, as Germany and the Soviet Union had completely different political ideas. The agreement said that:

- ✓ Germany and the Soviet Union would not support a third country if it attacked the other.
- ✓ They would not join an alliance aimed at the other.
- ✓ They would secretly invade and divide up Poland.

Hitler was pleased with this because it meant he would not be faced with a war on two front, and it meant he was closer to the Soviet Union for a potential future invasion. Stalin was pleased because he could take over parts of Poland, which would make it harder for him to be invaded in the future.

Task: Look at the cartoon on the next page. What is the message?



On 1st September 1939 German troops invaded Poland. The British and French governments decided to honour their promise to Poland to defend them. They gave Hitler an ultimatum demanding he withdraw his troops. He did not, and on 3rd September Britain and France declared war on Germany.

Task: Match up these key terms from Hitler's foreign policy with their definition.

Lebensraum	An agreement made between Hitler and Stalin to divide up Poland between them.
Anschluss	Increasing the military power of Germany.
Rhineland	Hitler's policy of increasing the amount of land that Germans could live in.
Communism	An agreement made between Hitler and Chamberlain to never go to war.
Re-armament	An area occupied by German speakers in Czechoslovakia, that Hitler wanted to take over.
Conscription	A strip of land between on the German-French border that Hitler was forbidden from putting his troops.
Sudetenland	A political ideology that Hitler hated, that was popular in the Soviet Union.
Munich Agreement	A union with Austria.
Nazi-Soviet Pact	Forcing people to join the army.